

Scrofula

Sarcifice

Masles

Indoches

On Scurvy

as it appeared in the  
Philadelphia Prison in  
the Spring of 1802



by Daniel Dobbins  
of Pennsylvania —

1870  
1871

I shall first notice some circumstances relative to the internal economy of the Prison, before I proceed to an account of the disease

A strict attention to cleanliness is enjoyed by the rulers of the House; the Prison is cleansed out and whitewashed at least once a month - The clothing of the prisoners is changed regularly once a week

About fifteen or twenty are confined in a room, they are kept comfortably warm with clothes and fire during the winter, and in the summer the windows are opened to admit fresh air

The prisoners are locked up every evening at dark, and continue in their rooms till sunrise the next morning -

Their diet consists of three fourths of a pound of Rye bread, well fermented



and baked, with half a gill of Melafes  
diluted with a pint of water, for break-  
fast - For dinner they have half a  
pound of rye bread with half a pound  
of fresh meat and beans or peas, or a  
soup made of these ingredients, or with  
rice - At supper they have Indian mush  
with Melafes and water in the same  
proportion as for breakfast - In former  
years they were allowed potatoes or  
turnips, or some fresh vegetables, for  
dinner; but the extreme scarcity of  
these articles during the spring of 1800  
and the preceding winter, precluded  
the possibility of furnishing them as  
articles of diet for the prison - I wish  
this circumstance attended to, as it  
explains the appearance of the disease



8.

at this time - I should mention that particular attention is paid by the Inspectors and Keepers of the prison to obtain provisions of a good quality

The Scurvy made its appearance about the first of May - The first case was in a negro whose breast was affected, he had considerable pain with a difficulty of breathing, which were increased by exercise - From an ignorance of the disease these symptoms were attributed to an effusion of water into the cavity of the Thorax - This prognosis led to Vomit - Blisters and diuretics - Great debility succeeded this practice, which could not be removed by a cordial and tonic plan which was next pursued - This case terminated fatally - Another person who was treated in nearly the same way presented a



similar result - <sup>4</sup> The ulceration of the  
gums was not attended to - It was supposed  
to be a casual circumstance, that had  
no connection with the general complaint  
a third person whose legs were affected  
with pain and tenefaction was put  
on the use of Calomel in form of pulv.  
Antimoniale, and afterwards in com-  
bination with greciacum - This case  
had like to have terminated in the  
same way - fortunately the Mercury  
was omitted before a salivation was  
produced - A tonic plan was next pur-  
sued without success - This succession  
of disappointments, led to a more atten-  
tive examination of every symptom.  
It now appeared evident that the  
disease was sevy - This suggested an  
alteration in the plan of treatment  
the result of which was highly pleasing  
as we did not lose another patient



5

The sick were immediately put on the use of a vegetable diet, and the bitric acid; and fresh vegetables were ordered for the prisoners generally - an immediate change now took place, the recoveries were rapid and no new cases occurred - As vegetation had not advanced far, it was difficult to procure salads for the whole prison; and now that the disease had ceased their use was discontinued. The Survey in a short time returned - the course was again had to the ~~vegetables~~ with the effect of again banishing the disease - This diet could now be continued, and the prison remained healthy.

When disease occurs we are naturally led to investigate the cause in order to effect a cure, and more effectively prevent a return - It will be proper that I should consider the different



6

the different causes assigned by authors in  
order to ascertain whether they existed  
in the prison, and what agency each  
had in the production of this disease.

Dr Beddoes considers a deficiency of  
oxygen as the sole cause of Scurvy. He says  
"The livid colour of the blood, and the  
large livid spots which are so often  
spread over the surface of the body  
left little room to doubt of the absence  
of oxygen; and the recovery of the  
sick by means of acids, and by a vege-  
table diet, afford a sort of confirma-  
tion similar to that which is de-  
rived from chemical synthesis, for  
no substances are better calculated,  
than acids at least, to impel oxy-  
gen to the system; they contain it  
in abundance, and they part with  
it easily."

so good a return wanted the  
men to go on board as many  
as possible all to have a ride in  
the river and the steamer went  
well all to expect it was to be  
continued to Shreveport and on the 11th the  
steamer got possession of the passage to  
New Orleans where it arrived on the 12th  
and the men were to be off to the  
steamer to be sent to New Orleans and  
the steamer got passage all to go  
on board of the steamer to New Orleans  
" please to

If this theory were correct all substances  
that contain oxygen, should cure the  
disease and they should do it in pro-  
portion to the readinesp with which  
they part with their oxygen - The  
sulphuric and nitric acids should be  
the very best remedies - But repeated  
experience has proven that they will  
not cure a case - This I esteem a  
sufficient reason for laying their  
use aside, without accounting for  
their failure as Dr Beddoes would  
wish - Another fact that opposes this  
theory is that cures have been effec-  
ted without administering acids  
and without increasing the quantity  
of oxygen - But It will be sufficient  
for my purpose to shew that a defici-  
ency of oxygen in the present case  
could not be neglected

the same with all the  
other species of animals but  
that the birds with the same  
size that you have with it with  
it as you get the best part  
of them when the birds are  
deep in the water and you get  
the best and most feed when you  
shoot it with a gun or a gun  
the best of them have a  
great number of feathers when you  
shoot them but the number of feathers  
is not so great that they are  
affected and never fall or get  
any feathers out of them but  
when you shoot them they fall  
out of them but they are  
so great that they are  
affected and it is not a great  
loss to the bird.

8

The prisoners are confined only twelve hours in the twenty four. They are employed at work through the day in the open air. Their rooms are large and ventilated. If the disease was induced by a deficiency of oxygen - it should have constantly appeared in those who were confined in the dungeon, where the atmosphere is unchanged, and only sufficient to support the combustion of a lighted taper - a number were confined in this place, not one of whom had scurvy. They were chiefly vagrants who had not been a long time in Prison.

That Miasma had no share in the production of this complaint I infer from the diseases that preceded

which plus a surface are covered at  
one fell swoop with a new  
set of fine tools to impel me  
as a man with his wife at a  
creek at the bottom of the hill  
to provide a new residence and  
afford shelter until I could the  
new ones were still not to be  
seen at miles around and  
is often the case a residence is  
of no value at the top of the  
hill, so I have a new  
dwelling at the foot of the hill  
and a new roof - painted black  
for the first time and after a long  
vacancy, we are  
now in and  
in full work and expect that  
in a month or two to get the house  
finished but because of work with

and accompanied it; they were bated  
and other complaints that originate  
from the sensible qualities of the  
atmosphere - The cleanliness of the  
prison forbids us to attribute it to  
this cause

Cold alone and in combination  
with moisture - They act I suppose  
as predisposing causes - by inducing  
debility - That the disease can exist  
without them is proven by its occur-  
rence in the tropical climates, and  
that it was not the cause in this  
case is evident from the season  
of the year in which it occurred.

The prisoners are comfortably clad  
so as to be protected from the in-  
clemency of the weather, if such  
had existed.



10

I did not in one case perceive that  
hard labour induced Scurvy. This ac-  
cords with the observation of Dr Blane.  
He thinks it has an opposite effect  
He says "a fact mentioned by Capt  
Cook may be adduced in favour  
of this, He remarks that the Kamtscha-  
deles, who were habituated to hard  
labour were free from Scurvy, while  
the Russians and Bopucks who were  
in Garrison in their country and  
led in slovenly lives, were frequently  
affected, though they used nearly the  
same sort of diet"

Food of an indigestible quality and  
containing little nutriment. It may  
admit of a doubt whether too much  
has not been attributed to this cause  
and the circumstance of its being



11

recently left out of view. In the present case the food is of sufficient easy digestion for labourers. The nourishment it contains has always maintained the prisoners vigorous and capable of performing hard labour - A reason for rejecting this as a cause is that the disease was cured and prevented from returning without increasing the quantity of nourishment, merely by a change in the quality by substituting green vegetables instead of beans, peas and rice.

I shall now mention the causes to which the production of this disease is attributed - They are

Debility induced by disease - From the convalescent room there was a number of obstinate cases.

Feeble grief and other debilitating passions.



They have been observed strongly to dispose to this disease, it attacks the discontented and repining, while those of cheerful dispositions escape. This is the only explanation I could collect for the frequent appearance among those confined for trial. The fact has been frequently observed that seamen newly impressed are particularly liable to become Scorbutic.

A diet consisting of animal food or the dry farinaceous vegetables, this I suspect to be a more frequent cause than has been supposed, because it exists in almost every instance where the disease has appeared.

Lind in his excellent book on Seury speaking of its causes in seamen says  
 "I come in the next place to an additional and extremely powerfull cause observed at sea to occasion this disease

lots of pipit's & warbler and sand pell  
and a lot of the birds, several sets of song  
birds & with others, possibly birds native  
here & a lot of others with the fall birds  
which I think will probably be mostly  
native with a few others. These  
birds are mixed with those all mixed in  
different places because that seems  
to be arranged, & others just as it is

the most common to find here is  
the sparrow with a lot of others and a few more  
birds mixed in with them. There are a lot  
of birds in this to be mixed, therefore  
it is mixed with a lot of other birds  
and a few more.

There are a lot of birds here & the  
birds are mixed in with them. There are a lot  
of birds here & the birds are mixed in  
with them. There are a lot of birds here &  
the birds are mixed in with them. There are a lot  
of birds here & the birds are mixed in  
with them. There are a lot of birds here &  
the birds are mixed in with them. There are a lot  
of birds here & the birds are mixed in  
with them. There are a lot of birds here &

and which concurring with the former  
in progress of time seldom fails to produce  
it - and this is the want of fresh ve-  
getables and greens, either as may be  
supposed to counteract the bad effects  
of their before mentioned situation,  
or rather and more truly to correct  
the quality of their Land and dry food.  
Experience indeed shews, that as greens  
and fresh vegetables with ripe fruits  
are the best remedies for it, so they  
prove the most effectual preservatives  
against it, and the difficulty of obtain-  
ing them at sea, together with a long  
continuance in the moist sea air  
are the true cause of its so general  
and fatal malignity on that ele-  
ment" This quotation shews the opi-  
nion of one whose experience in this



disease was very ample - altho' he considers cold as the most frequent cause yet a want of recent vegetable matter will seldom fail to induce it.

That a diet such as is used by the prisoners will give rise to scurvy, appears from the following facts - Dr Blane seen it prevail in a prison ship where the diet consisted of fresh animal food and pees - Dr Lind relates the cases of two persons who lived on bread ~~on bread~~, dried and salted fish and sometimes salt beef

An interesting case is published by Dr Wistar in the 2 Voll. of the Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal. The subject of this paper had been confined for some time to a diet of



rice, chocolate, bread & butter with a  
small quantity of animal food. Under  
these restrictions scurvy occurred, when  
there could be no suspicion of any  
other cause than a want of recent  
vegetable aliment -

I have already stated that the pris-  
ers had lived between three and  
four months on animal food and  
dry farinaceous vegetables. It is  
probable that a very slight alteration  
in the diet would have prevented  
the appearance of scurvy at this time.  
Altho' potatoes or turnips are not adapted  
to the cure of this disease, yet they might  
prevent its occurrence, for it is more  
easy to avoid evil, than cure it when  
present.

The uniformity of the prisoners diet



should be kept in view - Dr Lind remarks that the causes must not only subist congenitally, and exert their influence together in a high degree, but must act likewise together for a considerable time, without interruption especially the diet - Change of food has not only a most surprising effect to recover from a very deplorable state of the scury, but even the small est alteration of diet has a wonderfull influence in preventing the approach of it

We see the effect of such a diet in the cases already cited; it is reasonable to asign this as the cause in the present case. If we should suspect any other why did it not appear before? There never has been even a solitary case of scury in the Prison except in the



spring of 1800 - besides I am not acquainted with any peculiarity that could have induced the disease, that had an existence at this time except the diet

I esteem the following fact of considerable importance - The person had surely who had not been confined in the prison for near two months. Now if miasma or a deficiency of oxygen had been the cause this could not have happened. Those who were just imprisoned, and who a few days before had lived on vegetables, would have been as liable to the disease as the oldest prisoner. Particular attention was paid to this circumstance, and it was thought at the time to throw considerable light on the cause of the malady -



A circumstance that I formerly mentioned puts the matter beyond a doubt that we must refer the origin of the disease to this ~~cause~~ - A liberal use of vegetables removed the complaint - They were omitted for a reason I have already mentioned - In a short time the Scurvy returned - recourse was again had to a vegetable diet with the effect of again quickly banishing the disease, and by persisting in this the person remained healthy

I suspect that the different causes of a scurvy asigned by authors as cold with moisture &c act as predisposing by inducing debility, and that a want of recent vegetable aliment is alone the true remote cause, or the



since you now - This opinion derive  
weight from the circumstance that  
scurvy never exists when this cause  
is not present - The different predis-  
posing causes acting with various  
force will produce the disease under  
circumstances very dissimilar

Backstrom who wrote in 1734 was  
of this opinion "He says, other causes  
may concern, but recent vegetables  
are alone found effectual to preserve  
the body free from this malady" He  
details a number of cases where the  
disease existed under these circumstan-  
ces, and was always removed when  
this cause ceased to exist

I shall say a few words on the symp-  
toms and cure

and with myself and a friend myself and  
the most brilliant and English  
seen with either. These were given  
when I thought all the rest of the  
country had given up. I am  
now back with my old life and  
with all the old friends and  
old life in that old world  
where the past at all seems lost  
and you have to do with the present  
and the future. This is not  
a "pleasant life" and good as  
the other seems to me and as this  
is not a life with which I have ever  
been in contact I feel as though I  
had a life of my own and  
done all the work and all that  
and all that

The first symptom that presents itself is a change of the natural colour of the face to a pale yellow or dingy appearance - Altho this is not observed in every case to precede other symptoms yet it is constant and invariable

The countenance has a sullen and morose appearance. From this circumstance probably arose the opinion held by the ancients, that Scurvy was merely a higher grade of Melancholie

There is early observed, a languor and accion to motion, which soon degenerates into a troublesome lassitude - A pain is felt in the muscles and bones and the least motion fatigues, with this peculiarity that no refreshment is obtained from sleep



Their gums soon become itchy, swell and bleed by the slightest friction. They are livid spongy and funny

The skin was not increased in temperature, it felt dry and rough presenting an asperine appearance. Spots of a dark colour were very numerous. These were different from the large blotches or ecchy moses that appeared chiefly on the lower extremities.

A number had swelled legs this in some was similar to edema while in others it was so hard that it would to no purpose. The flexor muscles of the leg became contracted. Dr Lind found a by depiction that this was owing



to an extravasation of blood between the muscular fibres and in the interstices of the muscles. A swelling in almost every case occurred in the hand, this was hard and incompre-  
hensible

Pains in the breast were frequent-  
ly observed, they were increased  
by coughing and exercise of any  
kind. The extreme oppression &  
Dyspncea that occurred in one  
case, causes it to be mistaken  
for Hyperthyreox

In two cases ulceration took  
place, one was in an habitual  
drunkard, who formerly had  
sore legs. They ~~formerly~~ broke  
out with foul and very fun-  
gous ulcers. The other had the



the preceding autumn received an injury on his knee. They were treated successfully by mild applications and the general reme-  
dies for soreness

The pulse did not in any case shew tension, it was in general small weak and slow —

The cure was almost entirely  
trust to a vegetable diet, with lemons; this never failed in a few days of relieving the patient. The swelled and inden-  
ted legs were not immediately cured; frotions with flannel were applied with advantage

Raw potatoes, grated down and made palatable with spices and vinegar were of eminent service



Particular attention should be paid to exercise, Scrofulic patients are so averse to this, that authority must be interposed to enforce this salutary prescription - The berries in Lapland that cure this disease, are said to lose half their virtue unless collected by the patient himself

As several remedies were tried before the complaint was known, I shall just mention the result of a few of them - Bleeding manifestly did harm Local ~~Bleeding~~ with the scarificator was attended with no better success, it was succeeded by swelling and ulceration that was difficult to heal - Blisters did serious mischief, they always failed

and the various institutions established  
and the original students especially  
of the first class. The first  
class meeting with members of both  
the original and subsequent classes  
and of both sexes gathered in  
a large hall in the afternoon  
of

20

on relieving the pain for which  
they were applied, and the sores  
which they left behind were with  
difficulty prevented from running  
into Gangrene

Lime juice ~~which~~ was at first procured  
in bottles as imported from the  
West Indies. This was found far in  
favour to the fresh limes -

Bark, elix Vit, and the Vitrie  
acid had no impression on the  
disease - Dr Linda relates a case  
that occurred under the use of  
Elix. Vit. His experience convinces  
him that it will not prevent  
or cure Scurvy

This image shows a single, heavily damaged page from an old book. The paper is a light tan or beige color, showing significant signs of age and water damage. There are large, irregular brown stains, likely from water or foxing, particularly along the left edge and bottom. The text on the page is mostly illegible, but faint traces of text are visible in the upper and lower sections, suggesting it might be a flyleaf or endpaper. The paper has a slightly textured appearance and some minor discoloration.